



Rwanda

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, there were multiple reports that local authorities harassed and detained members of Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to have trouble in some provinces with their children being expelled from school. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 10,169 square miles, and its population is approximately 8.2 million. A 2001 study conducted by a foreign university reported that 49.6 percent of the population was Catholic, 43.9 percent Protestant, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 claimed no religious affiliation, and 0.1 percent practiced traditional indigenous beliefs. This study indicated a 19.9 percent increase in the number of Protestants, a 7.6 percent drop in the number of Catholics, and a 3.5 percent increase in the number of Muslims from the 1996 U.N. Population Fund survey. The figures for Protestants include the growing number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Protestant groups. There also is a small population of Baha'is and Jews. There has been a proliferation of small, usually Christian-linked schismatic religious groups since the 1994 Genocide.

Foreign missionaries and church-linked nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of various faiths operate, including Trocaire, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Federation, World Vision, World Relief, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Norwegian Church Aid, Salvation Army, Direct Aid (formerly the African Muslim Agency), Jesuit Relief Society, Christian Aid, Christian Direct Outreach, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, African Evangelical Enterprise, and Jesus Alive Ministries. Foreign missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs, and the Government has welcomed their development assistance.

There is no indication that religious belief is linked directly to membership in any political party. The Constitution states that political organizations are prohibited from basing themselves on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion, or any other division which may give rise to discrimination. Of the eight parties, the only one with a religious component to its name modified its title from the Democratic Islamic Party (PDI) to the Ideal Democratic Party, to comply with the Constitution. However, the party has always claimed to have non-Muslim members.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms. There is no state religion.

The law provides for small fines and imprisonment of up to 6 months for anyone who interferes with a religious ceremony or with a minister in the exercise of his or her professional duties. The law regulates public meetings and calls for fines or imprisonment for those who violate these regulations.

In 2001, the Government promulgated a law giving it more influence over NGOs as well as religious institutions and

organizations. The law requires NGOs to present their aims and plan of action to local authorities for "provisional agreement," and then to apply to the Ministry of Justice for legal recognition. Since the law was implemented, the Ministry of Justice has registered 11 new religious groups, including 5 during the period covered by this report. The Ministry did not deny any new applications; however, the Government continued the 2003 suspension of two "radical" splinter organizations, the "Eglise Methodiste Unie au Rwanda" (the United Methodist Church of Rwanda) led by Jupa Kaberuka, and the "Communauté Methodiste Union Internationale" (the International Union Methodist Community) led by Louis Bwanakweli, both of which attempted to register as the primary Methodist group in the country. The dispute between the two organizations was before the courts at the end of the reporting period. However, in general, no group's religious activities were curtailed as a result of difficulties or delays in the registration process.

There were reports that numerous religious organizations operated without legal recognition because the process is arduous, which government officials confirmed.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases, students are given a choice between instruction in "religion" or "morals." In the past, missionaries established schools that were operated by the Government. In those schools, religious instruction tends to reflect the denomination of the founders, either Catholic or Protestant. Muslim private schools operate as well.

The Government observes five holy days as official holidays: Christmas, Easter, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption. The Government recognition of these holy days does not negatively impact any religious groups.

Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve because of collaboration and dialogue in the areas of education and reconciliation. In March 2004, the Government participated in a conference with the Catholic Church on the 1994 Genocide.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government forbade religious meetings at night on the grounds that insurgents formerly used the guise of nighttime "religious meetings" to assemble their supporters before attacking nearby targets; however, during the period covered by this report, the Government allowed such meetings if religious groups provided advance notification. Religious leaders reportedly cooperated with the Government in limiting nighttime religious meetings and did not view the restriction as an infringement on their religious freedom. The Government continued to require religious groups to hold services at their established places of worship and to ban the use of private homes for this purpose. Some small religious groups that met in private homes were forced to move to new locations.

On June 30, 2004, the Parliament voted to accept recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Commission on Genocide Ideology; the commission was critical of a number of churches, their activities, and their leaders. The commission's report specifically targeted Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, a number of Pentecostal churches, and several Catholic priests. One example of such criticism was of a Catholic priest accused of promoting genocide ideology because he created an association of micro-credit borrowers, whose members all belonged to the same ethnic group. In another instance, several churches were accused of inciting their members to disobey government policies such as *gacaca* (a community-based model of conflict resolution) and night patrols. In addition, churches were criticized for allowing Hutu and Tutsi to sit separately during prayers. The commission recommended that the Government intervene in internal church politics to resolve leadership conflicts, that an association/prayer group called *Abahamya B'izuka* ("those who proselytize about Resurrection") should be abolished, and that the Government should counsel churches about which activities were acceptable. It also called on Parliament to adopt a special law to govern the functioning of all churches; however, there was no specific legal process to abolish the groups named by the parliamentary commission at the end of the period covered by this report.

The law does not require a person who wants to get married at a ceremony presided over by a government official to put his or her hand on the national flag, but this practice is enforced throughout the country. Jehovah's Witnesses have a very difficult time finding places to marry without this patriotic ceremony, to which they object on religious grounds. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that members of their faith have been beaten and imprisoned due to their refusal to place their hands on the flag.

According to church officials, in 4 of the country's 12 provinces, 39 children of Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from secondary schools between April and June 2004 for refusing to salute the national flag or to sing the national anthem. Three children were also expelled from school in March in Kirambo District, Cyangugu Province. Church officials have raised the issue with national authorities, but most of the children remained expelled from public schools at the end of the period covered by this report and were compelled to join private schools to avoid compromising their religious beliefs. In addition, local authorities in Kibungo, Ruhengeri, Gitarama, and Butare provinces supported such expulsions.

In February 2002, government authorities forbade Pasteur Bizimungu, a former president of the country who organized a political party banned by the Government in 2001, from attending public church services; authorities charged that Bizimungu's presence would be "divisive." The Government's action reportedly was politically motivated. In April 2002, Pasteur Bizimungu was arrested on charges of illegal political activity. He was later charged with threatening state security and with financial improprieties. The trial against him began in March 2004, and he was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years in prison in June 2004. On April 20, 2005, the High Court of the Republic ruled that it did not have the legal competency to receive his appeal and sent the case to the Supreme Court, where it was scheduled to be heard on July 21, 2005.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were numerous reports that members of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained or arrested for refusing to participate in night security patrols. Between January 1 and June 30, 2005, 60 Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned or detained on alleged security grounds, a dozen of whom faced severe beatings while in detention. Detentions ranged from 1 day to 1 month in length, and although only 10 persons remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government continued to make new arrests.

On February 18, 2005, the Minister of Local Government, Protais Musoni, issued a written directive to all 12 prefects (provincial governors) ordering them to halt the construction of Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Halls. In April, Musoni met with the church leaders and agreed to write another letter to all prefects, recommending that they meet with local Jehovah Witnesses leaders to discuss church policies. Church officials reported that as a result of subsequent meetings with local officials, construction work had resumed on Kingdom Halls at the end of the reporting period. Church officials hoped the increased dialogue with the Government would ease tensions, but they also feared continued detentions.

Nine Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in April 2005, and charged with rebellion. Three from Butaro District, Ruhengeri Province, have been tried. One was acquitted and two were found guilty and given sentences of 1 year, and 8 months, respectively, in addition to being required to pay court costs. On May 25, they appealed to the Provincial Appeal Court for Ruhengeri, which on June 24 overturned the verdict of the District court and ordered both men to be released. The remaining six, arrested in Nyamata District, Kigali Ngali Province, were convicted on charges of rebellion on March 18, 2005, sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment and payment of court costs, and released on May 30, a few weeks short of completing their sentences. According to the church leaders, the only evidence presented against the church members was their refusal to participate in compulsory, government-organized night patrols. The courts found that there is no law requiring participation in night patrols and that the prosecutor had wrongly applied a law that requires some form of "community work."

On March 25, 2005, 10 Jehovah's Witnesses from Matyazo sector were detained at Huye district in Butare province. The defendants were released on April 28 without trial or formal charges. In May, a local government sector coordinator, commonly known as a "counselor," went door-to-door warning people in Butare not to associate with the church, according to church leaders.

During the period covered by this report, Jehovah's Witnesses members from 5 of the 12 provinces were arrested on charges of "disobeying government emergency security policy," specifically, refusing to participate in night patrols. In three of the five provinces, local authorities reportedly beat the detained Jehovah's Witnesses. These included six that were arrested at Nyamata in Kigali Ngali Province on March 4, 2005, two that were arrested in Kigarama, Kibungo Province in March, and another arrested at Kaduha, Gikongoro Province, on May 1.

In 2004, two Jehovah's Witnesses' circuit overseers (church leaders) who travel to various congregations for ministerial activity were arrested. Police arrested Tharcisse Muhire in April 2004, at Ntongwe in Gitarama Province, on charges of "inciting school children to disrespect national symbols, and to oppose government policy on security." He reportedly was threatened and forced to walk for 4 hours under armed guard to the military prison in Nyamabuye-Gitarama; however, he was released in May, 2004. The other circuit overseer was arrested on June 20, 2004, and released the next day after a Jehovah's Witness delegation met with the authorities.

In January 2004, Pentecostal Pastor Majyambere was arrested in Kigali on charges of "preaching rebellion." On March 27, 2005, he was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. He was released on March 31 after having completed his full sentence. On May 8, 2005, 16 members of his congregation, including 5 women, were arrested and beaten at Kibagabaga, Kacyiru District, Kigali City. In March 2005, Pentecostal Pastors Stanislas Ntawurikura and Denis Serugendo were arrested in Kibungo Province on charges of rebellion. The 16 church members and both pastors remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

The eight members of a dissident Catholic congregation in Gisenyi Province accused of "subversive activities" and arrested in February 2004 remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

At the end of the period covered by this report, Pentecostal church leaders arrested in 2003 during a prayer service on Mt. Kigali for meeting at night and for practicing their religion outside their church (both considered to be threats to security) were still in detention.

No one has been held accountable for the 2002 attack on a Pentecostal group that had split off in the Gikondo district of Kigali; the perpetrators reportedly included Local Defense Forces and the mayor of the sector. The leaders of the church were arrested in February 2003 and remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

Some religious leaders were perpetrators of violence and discrimination, and several members of the clergy of various faiths have faced charges of genocide in the courts, in the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, and in foreign courts, notably in Belgium. In 2003, the ICTR concluded the trials of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and his son, Gerald Ntakirutimana. Both were found guilty of genocide; their appeals were

dismissed in December 2004. Of the 16 detainees awaiting trial at the ICTR in May 2005, 3 were religious leaders during the 1994 Genocide: Hormisdas Nsengimana, Rector of Christ-Roi College; Emmanuel Rukundo, a military chaplain; and Athanase Seromba, a Catholic priest.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There are numerous associations and interfaith groups, such as the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Rwanda, that contribute to understanding between the various religions.

The Interfaith Commission for Rwanda (launched by Muslims, Protestant and evangelical churches in 2003) promotes unity and reconciliation by supporting activities such as aid programs in 10 of the country's 12 provinces (all except Gikongoro and Kibungo) aimed at reconciling genocide survivors, released genocide prisoners, and genocide detainees' families. Mufti Saleh Habimana, the leader of Rwanda's Muslim community, participated in various international interfaith fora, including the World Conference of the Parliament of the World's Religions (held in Taiwan in November 2004), and the First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace (held in Brussels in January 2005), organized by the French organization "Homme de Parole."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with leaders and members of religious communities.

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and small, evangelical Protestant groups to promote interfaith dialogue and discuss religious freedom. In addition, Embassy officers regularly met with local and international NGOs involved in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts that focus on religious tolerance and freedom.

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